

# Promoting Tree Farm Programs to Conserve Natural Forests



WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Notes 8

Environmental Management



*By promoting tree farming for wood in idle lands, local governments can help increase income of small farmers while reducing pressure to exploit natural forests.*

## The Lack of Support for Tree Farming

Natural forests protect and sustain watershed areas supplying water to communities. This is one of the important reasons why these forests need to be protected through direct and indirect measures. The national government's Community-Based Forest Management and local reforestation programs are examples of direct measures aimed at improving our efforts to protect our watershed areas.

A case of indirect measure is the promotion of commercial tree farms as alternative local source of wood. Local governments are already investing in programs that promote small-holder tree farms for wood and wood products. A tree farm program can help increase farm incomes and generate local government revenues. Farmers in these communities will earn between P300,000 to almost a million pesos per hectare from some species after eight to 10 years. At the same time, availability of wood materials from tree farms reduces pressure on natural forests as a local source of wood.

In launching support programs for tree farming, local governments and farmers have to deal with important challenges. Ensuring that farmers have access to good quality planting material is a basic, crucial issue. Furthermore, farmers need sound technical advice on tree growing practices such as thinning. Local governments must also dialogue with concerned agencies to minimize situations where forestry regulations cause difficulties for farmers wanting to cut and sell their trees.

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## Technology

### Tree Farm Program Organizing Basics

These are some initial steps the local government can do when organizing a tree farm program:

1. Identify and check out idle land in the locality, both public and private, suitable for tree farming. Determine how these lands may be made available, e.g., lease between owner and growers.

2. Establish tree farm objectives with the help of resource persons. Determine what wood products farmers want to produce, e.g., lumber, firewood, or pulp and paper. The kind of land and the local markets available determine the species or type of tree to plant.

3. Identify and learn from other existing tree farm programs. Determine common concerns and aspirations of pioneering tree farmers in your area.

4. Organize dialogues between existing and potential tree growers and government regulatory agencies like the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) or Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR). Define



*In the absence of regular extension personnel for tree farming, provinces like Bohol and Palawan organize and train volunteer professionals and practitioners to form a pool of local trainer groups.*

shared problems and objectives, and agree on measures to address cumbersome regulations that make harvesting and transporting trees difficult and costly.

5. With the help of resource persons, develop a local support program for tree farming. At a minimum, the program must be able to help tree growers with the following:

- How to access land
- Where to secure good seedlings
- How to actively disseminate information on proper tree growing
- What incentives to provide, e.g., local real property tax deductions
- Where to get credit and micro-financing
- How to handle red-tape in getting harvesting and utilization permits

6. Organize training task forces consisting of interested government technicians, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and volunteer tree farmers to train farmers. Training can be done with a minimal fee, or participants can bring their own food.



*Local governments can encourage local organized groups to produce and sell good quality seedlings to tree farmers.*





## Policy and Practice

### Enabling Framework

The DENR is concerned that trees harvested from public reforestation programs are passed off as coming from private farms. This is why tree farmers selling cut trees are asked to give documentation about their source.

DENR Administrative Order No. 26, s. 1988, AO 79, s. 1990, and Memorandum Circular No. 97-09 deregulate the planting and harvesting of forest tree species. These tree species include the popular Gmelina, Bagras Mahogany, and others. Regulations enjoin local DENR officers and local governments to encourage tree farmers to register their tree farms. The Certificate of Registration (CR) will prove that cut trees come from pri-

ivate farms. In addition, farmers also have to get a Certificate of Verification (CV) to show that planted trees are ready for harvest and within the area specified in the Certificate of Registration.

DENR AO 96-24 encourages families, cooperatives, and associations to establish and benefit from tree farms on public lands designated as production forests. Through Socialized Forest Management Agreements (SIFMAs), national government allows the use of grasslands, brushlands, and open denuded forestlands for tree farming.

The Community-Based Forest Management Program encourages establishment of tree plantations in public

lands. It also guarantees security of tenure and harvesting rights for planted trees to families within identified CBFM project sites.

Section 17 of RA 7160, the Local Government Code, allocates five thousand (5,000) hectares of timberland for management by the municipality. Since these areas are often open grasslands, they can be devoted to tree-based enterprises. The Code also enjoins local governments to establish tree parks.

Several organizations are working together to amend existing policies to allow re-classification of forest trees into agricultural crops. The expected result is an ease in regulations that prevent private investments in tree farms.

### Practices That Are Working

The Province of Palawan started its Tree Resources for Economic and Environmental Security or Project TREES in 1997. Inspired after a cross visit to similar tree farming projects in the Visayas and Mindanao, the provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office and the Provincial Planning and Development Office conceptualized and got approval for

the project. Initial financial assistance came from the province's 20 percent development fund and additional funds from other sources.

Project TREES is a joint venture between tree farmers and the local government. The provincial government provides technical and financial assistance, materials, and start-up funds. The farmer provides a one-

hectare plot for the project. The farmer protects and maintains the tree farm. From the sale of harvested trees, the farmer retains 70 percent of revenues, while the provincial government receives 30 percent.

To ensure the viability of tree farms, the local government organized two teams of volunteer tree farm practitioners and trainers. These trained personnel, in turn, teach farmers proper tree growing techniques including proper thinning and pruning—a tree growing practice often absent in previous tree farm campaigns. Dialogues between tree farmers and regulatory agencies like the DENR and the DAR are also organized to find ways to help the farmer deal with difficult regulations on harvesting and selling trees.

The project provides livelihood opportunities to upland dwellers and reduces pressure on already limited forest resources through alternative wood sources. Piloted initially in four municipalities, project coverage has increased to include two more municipalities, or a total of six. Other municipalities have requested to be included in Project TREES.



*Organizing farmers' cooperatives is an approach to the implementation of the TREES project in Palawan.*



# LGU Action Agenda

## Other Initiatives

You could get information on tree farming if you get in touch with the TREES Project at this address: Project TREES, ENRO, Provincial Capitol, Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, telephone (048) 434-3042 or 433-4579.

The **Province of North Cotabato** works with the DENR and its tree farmers to stimulate investments in wood processing that, in turn, encourage more tree farmers. Their wood industry council can share their experience in this regard.

The **Province of Bohol**, working with the local Central Visayas College of Agriculture and Forestry (formerly Bohol Agricultural College) and the local chamber of commerce, has launched Bohol Tree Enterprise Program. For more information on this project, you may write the Bohol Tree Enterprise Program, Bohol Environmental Management Office, PPDO, Provincial Capitol Bldg., Tagbilaran, Bohol; or you may call (038) 411-2088.

In the **Province of Bukidnon**, the Bukidnon Environment Small-scale Tree Farm (BEST) Project has been ongoing for some time. Their experience may guide you as you begin your tree farm program. You may contact them at this address: Bukidnon Environment and Natural Resources Office, Provincial Capitol, Malaybalay, Bukidnon (088221) 841-2396.

### What You Can Do

1. Talk to tree growers in your locality who pioneered tree farming to know their constraints and opportunities.
2. Discuss with the local DENR office how to operationalize Memorandum Circular 97-09 to facilitate the issuance of Certificates of Registration to tree farmers without difficulty. With this certificate, farmers will no longer have to get cutting permits.
3. Contact nongovernmental resource organizations for more information on promising communities and private sector practices. An example of this is the TREES Consortium mentioned here.

### Did You Know?

That at P20 per board foot, a 10- to 12-year old tree can yield P4,000. In addition, a farmer can earn P12,000 per hectare from thinning for firewood or poles. Thus, total earnings per hectare range from P330,000 to P930,000. By providing enabling conditions like streamlining cumbersome tree harvesting rules, local governments can attract small and big private investors to establish tree farms.

## Resources and References

### Sources of Technical Information

There are still only a few resource organizations providing technical assistance even as the number of tree growers increases. Look into who is practicing tree farming in your community or ask organizations like the **DENR** or the **Department of Agriculture (DA)** for more useful information. DENR and **DAR** could provide information on available land suitable for commercial tree farming.

Technical information and financing are two other factors you have to consider. Local governments mentioned here, selected State Colleges, projects, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the **Total Reforestation for Economic and Ecological Sustainability (TREES) Consortium** or the **LEAF Foundation** could give you information on how to avail of these necessary inputs. You may call the TREES Consortium at (02) 634-2819. The LEAF Foundation may be contacted at (086) 853-4315.

Then, when it's time to plant, contact your local DENR offices, and ask if they have seedlings that your farmers choose to plant. You could also help farmers get in touch with private nurseries recommended by plantation growers. Some of the organizations mentioned here could assist you.